

RANDOM THOUGHTS OF THE PROFESSOR

BY S. L. JOSHI

NO ONE can survey the present-day situation throughout the world in all fields of thought and activity without realizing the grim fact that we are witnessing the disappearance of cherished traditions, principles of thought, and well-established institutions, and there is a growing vacuum created in the debris of the past, challenging human intelligence to fill that vacuum with fresh creative effort in thought and action. It is being felt everywhere that the whole future of civilization will be largely determined by the amount of intelligence and foresight with which definite plans will be made to shape the destiny of all nations.

Throughout the nineteenth century western nations were busily engaged in imposing their views of life, their cultures, and their schemes of thought upon the more ancient peoples of the Asiatic Continent. There was also the effort to make a critical study of the cultural treasures of Asiatic nations in order to add to the sum total of human knowledge and to create a world-view of human progress as a whole. Human achievements in the field of modern science gave man a certain degree of self-confidence in his capacity to control the forces of nature, and whereas in the pre-scientific ages man either surrendered completely to his physical environment or carried on a feeble struggle against hostile natural forces, modern man with the powerful weapon of scientific knowledge has definitely shown himself capable of transforming unfavorable environments and adapting them to his plans and purposes. Wherever he has not fully succeeded in this effort, he has learned to adapt himself to those elements in the environment which have been known to be opposed to his interests. The nations of Asia have admired the growing capacity of western man to transform his environment, and have steadily attempted to be initiated into the knowledge of the modern sciences in order that they too may become masters of their environment.

Of all Oriental nations, Japan has led the way to demonstrate what great possibilities lie in store for all Asiatics who would be willing to assimilate scientific knowledge and apply it intelligently in fighting climatic and other physical conditions which have in the centuries of the past been responsible for the alarming poverty, ignor-

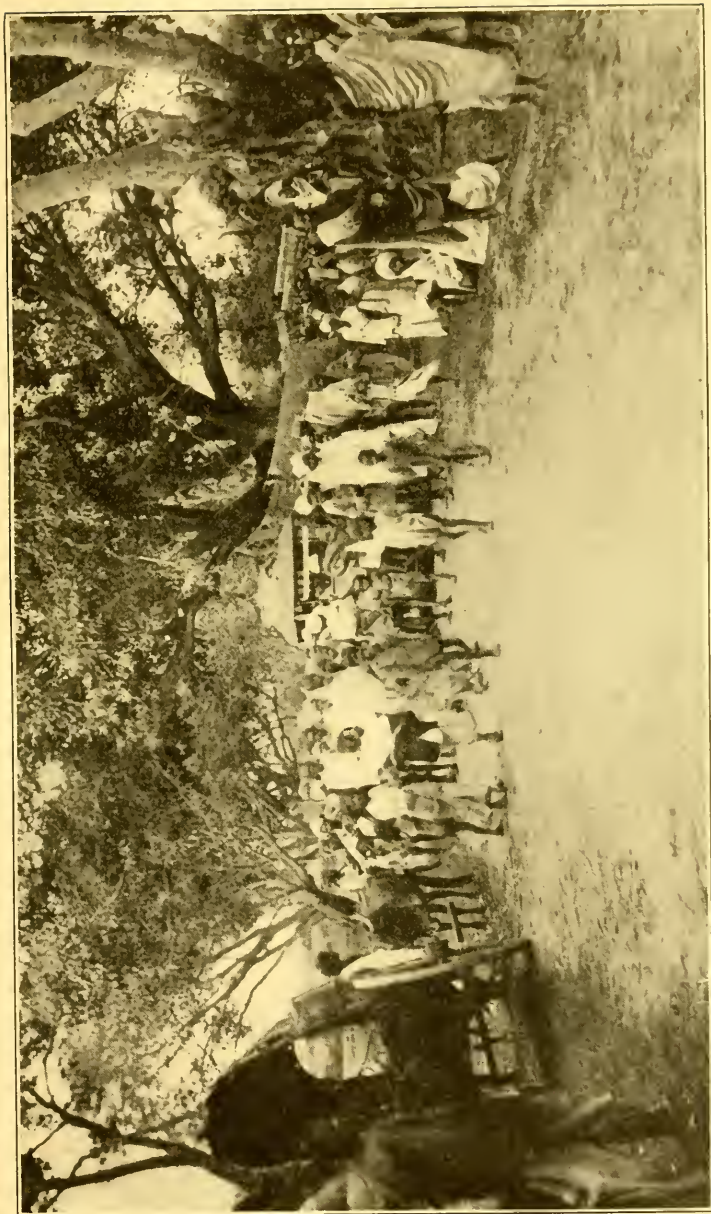
ance, and disease which one can witness throughout the East. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century there were definite movements organized in India, China, and Japan for the purpose of sending picked young men to the universities of Europe and America, specifically for the obtaining of scientific knowledge which was regarded as essential for the conquest of the three great enemies of mankind,—poverty, ignorance, and disease.

Meanwhile, other problems were created in the relations between western nations and the peoples of Asia. These problems were particularly acute in those fields which affect man's physical existence. The growth of modern imperialism in western Europe was essentially directed towards the exploitation of the weaker races of mankind through channels supplied by modern scientific knowledge. The raw materials available in the vast sub-continent of Asia were needed for sustaining the new industrial organizations of the western world, and these were transformed into finished goods and sent back to the great markets of Asia. The rise of modern capitalism owes a great deal of its vigor to this commercial relationship between the West and the East. Capitalism also began to clash with the interests of the working classes in the western world, and the class struggle which we are witnessing in the West today is merely another phase of the great economic conflict whereby modern industrialism has succeeded in destroying the handicrafts of millions of Asiatics and turning them into mere customers for western goods.

Much has been written by competent scholars upon the subject of the influence of the West on the civilizations of eastern nations, not only in the field of economics, but also in the field of thought. It is noticeable that several modern writers have been devoting their attention to the influence exerted by eastern thought on western minds. There has been, therefore, considerable give and take between the two halves of the human race. It is curious, however, that while on the one hand scientific improvements in land and sea transportation have tended to annihilate time and distance, making the whole world a great neighborhood, there has been a corresponding growth of misunderstandings created by ill-informed men and women towards a clearer evaluation of social facts in different parts of the world. The newspaper press, both in Europe and in America, has not always indicated a spirit of fairness in interpreting the trend of modern events in the Orient. When to this we add the growing volume of

political propaganda carried on in the United States by various nations with the specific object of misleading the reading public, it can be seen easily why these misunderstandings have been on the increase. The Christian churches, primarily interested in the propagation of their particular brand of Christianity in Asiatic lands, have often been the sole sources of information through missionary reports regarding life and thought among the Oriental nations. They have hardly ever shown a tendency to credit eastern nations with virtues and merits which can be favorably compared with those of Christianity. The missionary literature of the past fifty years in America contains an immense mass of material which, if critically examined in the light of modern knowledge, would seem to indicate an unintended tendency on the part of the Christian to bear a false witness against his non-Christian brother. The advocacy of special causes, however significant in themselves, must always be subordinated to the claims of truth, and human facts should be ascertained, classified, and examined with a passionate disinterestedness in order to arrive at sane conclusions. The report of the Laymen's Commission which was sent to the Orient not long ago contains a great many radical suggestions towards a reconstruction of the Christian missionary policy in dealing with non-Christian religions and their followers. It is, however, disconcerting to note that many of these recommendations have been practically shelved by missionary organizations, and no adequate action has yet been taken in this direction.

It is refreshing to turn from the economist, the politician, and the churches towards the universities and colleges of the western world. The great educational foundations of America have been steadily rendering the most effective service towards the solution of the problems of poverty, ignorance, and disease. The universities of America have never been so handicapped by tradition as the universities of the Old World, and the American mind, with its vigor and initiative, has constantly shown a desire and a readiness to try daring experiments in the field of education. While on the one hand the American government by passing the Asiatic Exclusion Act has definitely closed its doors against the citizens of India, China, and Japan, the American universities and colleges have steadily shown a growing interest in extending their hospitality to Oriental students and professors, with an intense desire to broaden opportunities for



Photograph by Walter E. Clark

A VILLAGE SCENE IN INDIA

a thorough-going knowledge of the cultures of Asia so that the rising generation of America may have better opportunities to acquaint themselves with the basic cultural ideals of eastern races. The Rockefeller Foundation has been spending millions of dollars year after year in medical research carried on primarily for the conquest of disease—especially those diseases which have shown a definite tendency to sap the life-blood of tropical races.

The Oriental student in America who has made a careful observation of American life and has acquired self-confidence and initiative in dealing with the practical problems of life, is always better equipped to deal with the problems of poverty and disease in the Orient than his comrades in his own land. He begins to dream Utopian dreams for the transformation of the physical environment in his own land and is fired with a fresh enthusiasm which works as a driving force to enable him to realize, after hard and faithful labor in however small a measure, some degree of success in setting back the advance of poverty, ignorance, and disease.

The main task of civilization is to raise the level of individual intelligence and character so as to make possible the formation of better organized social groups and to organize society in such a way as to call forth the finer qualities from the character of its citizens. No one can dispute that this task is seriously interrupted by war, whereas it is actively promoted by education of all kinds. This explains why the American people are naturally averse to indulging in the luxury of warfare and why they place the foremost emphasis on education as the one key to achieve the main goal of civilization. Sir Michael Sadler has well described the public school as the established church of America.

On the one hand, all the nations of the world are being confronted by problems which have a striking similarity. On the other hand, it is beginning to be realized more and more in all parts of the civilized world that it is only with the help of the right type of education that we can prepare the youth of today to meet successfully the problems of tomorrow. This would seem to indicate that by the very nature of the case, colleges and universities in all countries would tend more and more to pursue various methods and evolve various types of education primarily intended to achieve the supreme task of civilization. We are told that in England higher education has been framed for the purpose of producing a true gentleman. In

Germany it is the ideal scientific expert who is regarded as the goal of higher education. In America the stress is primarily laid on the formation of the ideal citizen. It is hardly possible to detach these three aims in a clear-cut way. It is by harmonious combination of all of them that the main end of civilization will be realized.

The recent World War furnished a great handle for the growth of a strong conviction among younger men that youth could no longer place implicit faith in the wisdom of the fathers. There is a world-wide revolt of youth against established institutions, older modes of thought, and traditional morality. Organized religion everywhere is also losing its hold on the minds of young men. The growth of the new scientific movement has produced abundant material to uphold the claims of the naturalistic as against the idealistic philosophy of life. This struggle between naturalism and idealism assumes new forms from time to time, but it is the central conflict staged in the theater of modern thought. The conflict between so-called humanism and theism is only another aspect of the same central struggle. The gospel of individualism has been carried to extravagant limits among modern democracies and has profoundly affected the bonds of the family life. While medical and surgical science on the one hand has steadily prolonged the average life of man in the western world, new forces of destruction have added to the uncertainty of life. The high-pressure life of a highly industrialized society is characterized by new types of disease, and there is an alarming growth of insanity in the western world. The abnormal growth of crime in modern cities has always been a challenge to the intelligence of those in power in city, state, and federal governments.

The late Professor Giddings of Columbia University used to remind his students that the main problems of civilization can be grouped around three questions:

1. Whether some races are inherently superior to other races.
2. Whether any one religion is superior to all other religions.
3. Whether man is superior to woman.

America has had no trouble in solving the third question with a vengeance, so that the problem there is completely inverted and amounts to whether man has any chance to claim equality with woman. The other two questions, revolving around race and religion, have produced a volume of pseudo-scientific literature and have added to the mental confusion already existing in the world. Islam,

more than Christianity, has demonstrated a unique capacity to deal with the race problem. The conclusions of ethnology are still far from final on this important subject. The discovery of the religious literatures of the world has made it possible for modern scholars to make a comparative study of the merits of various religions. In making such comparisons, it must be borne in mind that religious systems are like great works of art, each having its own merits and weaknesses, and, therefore, they cannot be compared in their entirety.

The colleges and universities of the civilized world have felt the necessity of intellectual cooperation, because they all are engaged in finding solutions for identical problems. They must primarily seek to enlarge the intellectual horizon of the student until opportunities are provided for obtaining a world-view of all cultures and civilizations. They must also help in building a bridge between modern industrialism and culture, and strive to broaden the interest of the student in world problems which transcend all forms of nationalism. The whole conception of what constitutes true success in life should be exalted, so that the mere making of money may come to be regarded only as a means and not as an end in itself. In a democratic society there should be clear conceptions of the dimensions of individual liberty, and a clear distinction made between wisdom and knowledge, as well as between pleasure and happiness. The problem of the right utilization of leisure will also continue to engage the thought of leading educators throughout the world. The difference between knowledge and wisdom is essentially implied in the distinction between scientific pursuits and spiritual ideals. It should be the task of the educator to build a bridge between the two, so that man may realize the importance of studying not only the relative value of things, but synthesizing them with a passionate love for those universal values which ultimately give meaning and significance to life.